

News Release



Controller of the State of California - Kathleen Connell

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SAVE PURPLE HEARTS FOR THEIR RIGHTFUL OWNERS

California State Controller Connell Calls for Nationwide Ban On States Selling Military Honors In Unclaimed Property Auctions

WASHINGTON, D.C., July 17, 2000 --- California State Controller Kathleen Connell, joined by military veterans who have been awarded purple hearts for battlefield bravery, today called on her counterparts in other states to stop selling military honors turned over to state officials from inactive safe deposit boxes.

Under legislation sponsored by Connell this year, California became the first state to outlaw the sale or auctioning off of military medals and honors from the state's Unclaimed Property.

State Controller Connell told a capitol hill news conference, "Those medals should only belong to the brave men and women who earned them in the service of their country or their immediate families. It is improper for states to sell these symbols of honor as though they were mere trinkets in a garage sale."

Recipients of military honors, including Purple Heart veterans joined Connell to urge other states to follow California's example. Edward Oliver of Forestville, Maryland received his Purple Heart in March, 1945 after being wounded in the Phillippines during World War II. "These honors are important because you get recognition for what you did do. It's not right to sell them to someone else," said the former navy Seabee.

Frank Wickersham of Arlington, Virginia earned two Purple Hearts during the Vietnam War. The ex-Marine, who also served in Desert Storm, praised Connell for taking a leadership role on this issue.

Until Connell's legislation was passed in May, as Controller she would have been forced to sell 88 military honors from 29 inactive safe deposit boxes in the state's annual unclaimed property auction. The honors included six purple hearts, a Bronze Star, and a distinguished service medal.

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“It’s reasonable to assume that other states are in the same position, but only six of them have administrative rules preventing such sales. No state, other than California, has a law banning the sale of military honors in their unclaimed property,” notes Connell.

State Controller Connell says her staff has contacted the unclaimed property custodians in the other 49 states. Among those who have responded so far, major states such as Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania report they auction military honors with the other unclaimed property.

Representative Brad Sherman, (D - California), lauds Connell’s efforts and plans to explore possible national legislation. “The federal government issues these awards in behalf of the nation to honor special acts of bravery by specific people. The federal government has an interest in preventing anything that demeans these honors,” Sherman said.

State Controller Connell notes that though these medals are escheated to a state’s unclaimed property doesn’t mean they aren’t valued by the veterans who earned them or their families. “In many cases, the aging veteran, or that veteran’s family members are unaware the items are in state custody.”

Working with volunteers from the California National Guard Museum, Connell will try to locate the recipients of the 88 medals in her custody. Those medals that can’t be reunited with their rightful owners will be stored at the State National Guard Museum.

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